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WINSTON LORD
President

September 26, 1978

Dear Council Member:

Enclosed is an article by James Hoge, Editor-in-Chief of Chicago's Sun Times, based on his trip last Spring, with ten other Council members, to NATO facilities in Western Europe. This special visit to the alliance's headquarters and installations was at the invitation of the NATO Command and organized by the Council's two resident Military Fellows, Colonel John O. B. Sewall, USA, and Colonel Richard G. Head, USAF. Other members of the group were drawn from the Council membership at large and represented a mix of backgrounds and professions.

Since you have indicated a specific interest in NATO affairs, I thought you would find this report on the European military balance of particular value.

Sincerely,

Winston Lord

CHI

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views/business

Section 2

With NATO: Squaring off in Europe

NATO nations have pledged to spend $80 billion more on defenses, a belated recognition that the East-West square-off in Central Europe is tilting dangerously in favor of the Soviets—and a reluctant acknowledgment that European arms control negotiations are making no progress.

By James Hoge

Sun-Times Editor in Chief

The Belgian tank commander showed me where to hang on and how to brace myself against the hard rubber ring circling the turret opening.

Then the 40-ton German-made Leopard tank, capable of 75-m.p.h. speeds, barreled across the open field, smashing through bushes, looping in and out of gullies.

As the Leopard zigzagged and pitched over the rough terrain, its 105-mm. gun remained menacingly fixed on a distant target.

Through self-stabilization, the Leopard's massive gun has a deadly life of its own. It is but one of the technological marvels that are transforming the armies of East and West in Central Europe.

At enormous expense, both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the opposing Warsaw Pact are putting their forces on wheels and giving them electronic eyes, ears and voices.

"Nobody will walk to the next war," said a Belgian general during battlefield exercises concluded just before my guest trip in the Leopard.

Soldiers will ride in armored vehicles, and each will have his own fighting porthole; tanks will "see" at night; all-weather fighter planes will distinguish instantaneously between friend and foe in the crowded skies; soldiers will shoulder-fire anti-tank missiles that "home" in on targets; radar-guided anti-aircraft guns will fire from self-propelled tank-like chassis; communications systems will flash lengthy data "bursts" in seconds, and nuclear weapons will radiate (instead of blast) people to death—if President Carter's delay of neutron warheads proves to be only a delay.

WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE, all these grisly marvels—and more—may be squared off against each other along the East-West frontier in Central Europe.

Such a square-off of equally modernized armies assumes that the United States and its 14 NATO partners will continue their commitment to increase defense expenditures by 3 per cent starting in 1979.

The joint pledge to spend $80 billion more on NATO defenses over the next 15 years is belated recognition that the East-West square-off in Central Europe is tilting dangerously in favor of the Soviets. It is also reluctant acknowledgment that European arms control negotiations are making no progress.

Over the last decade, while the United States was preoccupied with the war in Vietnam, the Soviets steadily increased the quantity and quality of Warsaw Pact forces. They are still doing so.

If war broke out now, a relatively confident U.S. general said of the Soviet forces, "I think I can slow them; I hope I can contain them; I know I can't eject them."

A more pessimistic Belgian major general said, "We will continue our discussion on whether we were adequately prepared in Cell 15 at Vladivostok."

THE SOVIET EDGE IS MOST dramatically apparent in the enormous buildup of tanks, tactical aircraft and artillery.

Less dramatic, but of increasing concern, is the qualitative improvement in Warsaw Pact forces.

In the process, NATO is losing its most comforting consolation: "They may have more but we have better. . . ."

The Soviets have improved their weaponry, ammunition, tactics and logistics.

They now have superior battlefield communications and can jam and knock out NATO communications. They have an armored infantry fighting vehicle—a glaring omission in U.S. forces; and they can wage biological and chemical warfare and protect their troops against it.

Most worrisome is their closing of the tactical nuclear weapon gap with the development of the mobile SS-20 multiple-warhead missile and the intermediate-range Backfire bomber.

But NATO intelligence officers still find plenty to criticize about the Warsaw Pact's war-making potential.

Even with improvements, Soviet supply logistics are questionable; training exercises rigid and unimaginative;

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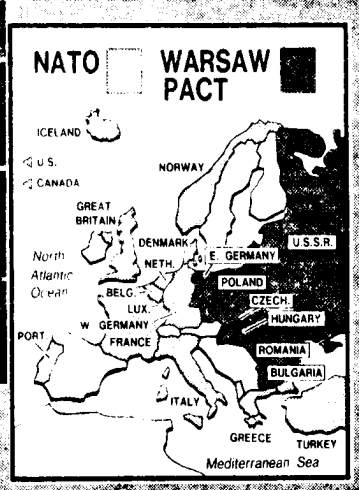
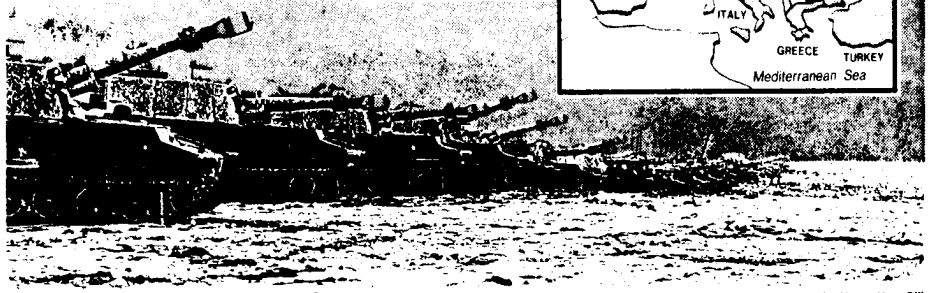
NATO and Warsaw Pact Balance

	Northern and Central Europe			Southern Europe		
	NATO	WARSAW PACT	USSR ONLY	NATO	WARSAW PACT	USSR ONLY
Combat manpower in all types of formations	630,000	945,000	540,000	360,000	390,000	145,000
Main battle tanks in operational service	7,000	20,300	13,500	4,000	6,700	2,500
Tactical aircraft in operational service	2,350	4,075	2,300	950	1,575	750
Conventional artillery and rocket launchers	2,700	10,000		3,500	4,000	

	NATO	WARSAW PACT
Nuclear warheads	7,000	3,500
Total population	558,970,000	363,530,000
Gross national product per person	$6,040	$2,780





SOURCE: Institute for Strategic Studies, World Bank

Sun-Times graphic by Jack Jordan; photo by Henry Herr Gill

For this report on military preparedness in Western Europe, Sun-Times Editor in Chief James Hoge recently visited NATO facilities.

He and 10 other members of a New York Council on Foreign Relations group interviewed senior political and military officials at NATO headquarters in Brussels and Mons, Belgium. They observed exercises of the 1st Belgian Corps and the 1st German Corps at Cologne and Westerberg, Germany. They received intelligence briefings on the military status of the opposing Warsaw Pact alliance and interviewed senior officers of the United States Army Europe and the Allied Air Forces Central Europe in Heidelberg, Germany.

A Germany divided?

It is still official West German policy to seek peaceful reunification with East Germany. An interesting view of public opinion emerged from a recent poll of how West Germans felt about their sister state. A majority of young people said they considered East Germany a foreign nation in which the populace happened to speak German—as in Austria and parts of Switzerland.

'Nobody will be walking to the next war'

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battlefield leadership deficient, particularly at the regimental and battalion level, and fighter pilots undertrained and too wedded to ground control.

The biggest imponderable for the Soviets remains the questionable reliability in wartime of their six Eastern European client-states—especially Poland and Czechoslovakia.

BUT SUCH DEFICIENCIES SEEM small compared with recent advances—advances that, in sum, have greatly shortened the time needed for Soviet mobilization.

Where once NATO expected three weeks' evidence of intent to attack, it now may have little more than 48 hours' alert—at best a week.

Within that time frame, the Soviets could launch a full-scale attack, involving up to 90 divisions.

It isn't considered likely that they will do so in the foreseeable future, despite the chill that has come over East-West relations in recent months. The NATO deterrent is still sufficiently potent.

But political officials at NATO are quick to stress the nonmilitary benefits that could accrue to the Soviets because of their military strength. Political intimidation of Western European nations and adventurism on the periphery, such as in Africa, become possibilities if Warsaw Pact military might appears to far outstrip NATO defenses.

Military officers are less interested in possible Soviet *intentions* than in their *capabilities*. And it is the buildup of Soviet armor, the pre-positioning of supplies and the emphasis on flexible, offensive tactics that have spread alarm through the officers' ranks.

Their concern is now shared by political leaders of the NATO nations, and the result has been the increased defense budgets tied to a long-term program for strengthening NATO.

One senior NATO commander said that "more has happened in the past year than in the previous 28 years of NATO's existence."

WHAT HAS HAPPENED, while it can't fulfill that expansive assessment, is impressive. Under the highly regarded leadership of European Supreme Allied Comdr. Alexander M. Haig Jr., NATO has tackled some of its thorniest problems.

By early next year, a U.S. brigade will be repositioned from southern Germany to the undermanned northern plain, considered the most likely invasion route.

Tactics, supplies and equipment maintenance are being made interoperable wherever possible, although this remains a major problem in the multination NATO alliance. War-ready stocks are being increased and agreement has been reached on an expensive, less vulnerable communications system for the 1980s and 1990s. Coming on line in the next decade are modern anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, all-weather fighter planes, armored helicopters and, for the United States, a new heavy tank and an infantry fighting vehicle equal to the Soviets'.

Members of a Soviet surface-to-air missile unit during a practice alert. (UPI)

One of NATO's biggest deficiencies remains the lack of adequate operational reserves to counter breakthroughs of the forward defense at West Germany's eastern border.

As a partial remedy, the United States is expanding its ability to speed reinforcements across the Atlantic. The objective is to double the U.S. Army in Europe in two weeks and triple U.S. aircraft in one week after hostilities break out. The resulting U.S. fighting force would consist of 350,000 combat troops and 1,900 aircraft.

At best, U.S. reinforcement is only part of the answer. At worst, it could prove to be of marginal help if improved Soviet air and submarine forces disrupted supply routes and shut off ports of entry on the continent.

MUCH NEEDED IS AN EXPANDED ready reserve in place. But so far, the European members of NATO have failed to overcome political and economic hurdles to creating an efficient reserve from their own ample manpower pool.

In general, political and economic problems are among NATO's gravest concerns.

Political instability and economic stagnation would critically undermine the alliance. There have been ample signs of both in all the member nations.

Coalition governments in The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy survive on wafer-thin popular mandates. France, while co-operating far more than in Gen. Charles de Gaulle's day, still stands formally aloof from NATO. Great Britain argues most consistently against the forward defense strategy and has gone its independent way in reducing troops in Europe and in equipping its air force with a separate communications system. Denmark and The Netherlands still haven't mustered the political will to join in the 3

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German-made Leopard tanks under command of Belgian 1st Corps troops assigned to defend NATO's north central frontier between East and West Germany.

Can Soviet Union keep up its spending pace?

Rough calculations put Soviet military expenditures at $150 billion a year, compared with $170 billion for NATO as a whole. Far less of the Soviet budget goes to personnel expenses, and far more to procurement of new weapons.

Can the Soviet Union continue to spend so much money on the military?

It is a key question for NATO and much research has gone into trying to answer it.

The growth rate of the Soviet economy has slipped from just under 6 per cent in the 1950s to about 4 per cent today. It is expected to decline to 3 or 3½ per cent in the early 1980s.

Even so, the Soviets have maintained a steady allocation of some 11 to 13 per cent of gross national product to the military.

A recently concluded NATO study predicts that the Soviet military budget will maintain its priority position, growing by 5 per cent a year through the next decade.

Some senior NATO officers are not so convinced that the Soviets can sustain such a pace. They cite a shrinking labor force, continued low productivity and higher energy costs.

No signs of slowdown in military procurement have yet appeared. Soviet armaments factories are turning out some 3,500 T-64 tanks, 1,800 combat aircraft and 250 nuclear missiles a year. In comparison, three months of Soviet production equals the entire British inventory.

Looking to the 1980s, the Soviets can be expected to seek further Western credit and technology transfers to help solve their economic difficulties.

Thus, the West can consider a hard bargain: credit and technology for reduced Soviet defense spending. To date, the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions negotiations at Vienna have failed to put any caps on the weapons race in Europe.

James Hoge

NATO force of Belgian paracommandos during an exercise in the Mediterranean area.

East-West square-off in Central Europe

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per cent defense budget increase.

On the flanks of the alliance are the most serious weaknesses.

On the northern flank, Norway has a single brigade guarding upper Scandinavia against the threat of a Soviet push over the top of Europe.

On the south, Greece, embroiled with Turkey over Cyprus, is abstaining from NATO planning and exercises. The U.S.-equipped Turkish army is in a shambles after three years of being denied spare parts and new equipment under the congressionally initiated embargo.

Moving closer to the center, Yugoslavia holds out the possibility of major unrest after the death of 85-year-old Tito. It is a subject too sensitive even for background briefing discussions.

ON THE BRIGHTER SIDE is evidence of increased political stability in France and economic upturn in Great Britain. In the rear of NATO, Spain and Portugal have weathered the first traumas of shucking off right-wing dictatorships and Spain is considering how to move slowly toward more cooperation and eventual integration into the NATO alliance.

In all the countries of Western Europe the public mood is less apathetic than several years ago at the height of the detente spirit. Still, skepticism that there is a threat from the East, coupled with real economic problems of rising prices and unemployment, make increased defense expenditure a difficult cause for politicians to champion.

And there remains an uncomfortable penchant among Western Europeans to think that somebody else will handle the Soviet problem ("the Americans will deter them. . . the Chinese will. . . the unreliable East Europeans will. . . ").

Similar thinking supports the argument that nuclear weapons can be the West's least expensive way of deterring far superior Soviet conventional forces.

Such an attitude may be the most dangerous of all inter-Western concerns for NATO.

The Soviets have achieved parity with the United States in strategic nuclear capabilities, and they are close to neutralizing one-third of our strategic triad with super-accurate missiles that can knock out intercontinental ballistic missiles in their hardened silos. The Soviets now may have the edge in tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe.

Thus nuclear weapons may not be a sure-fire deterrent. If relied upon too heavily for deterrence, nuclear weapons become the only means of defense. And what is now a likelihood would become a certainty—that a war engaging NATO and Warsaw Pact forces would escalate over the nuclear threshold.

"Our best hope if war occurs," said a senior NATO commander, "is to create a conventional stalemate within the opening days of hostilities. Maybe then, just maybe, the politicians and diplomats on either side could bring the conflict under control before we moved on to incinerate everyone with nuclear warheads."

Europeans' confidence in Carter leadership wanes

President Carter came into office a year and seven months ago promising greater attention to NATO.

He and his defense secretary, Harold Brown, set about putting flesh on the words. Eight thousand additional U.S. troops were positioned in Europe and a long-term study of NATO needs was undertaken, followed by actions to upgrade readiness, reinforcement and rationalization of NATO fighting forces and their supplies.

Despite this unprecedented increase in the U.S. contribution to NATO, confidence in Carter's leadership has plummeted among Europeans.

They question his competence to engage in superpower rivalry with the Soviet Union. They worry about the cumulative effect of unilateral pledges to withdraw troops from Korea, to reject military aid to post-Tito Yugoslavia and to maintain a low level of U.S. involvement in Africa.

They don't understand why production of the B-1 bomber was halted and development of the neutron weapon was delayed without exacting matching concessions from the Soviets.

However, there are some sound arguments against deployment of the neutron weapon for field use against tanks. It lowers the threshold for when nuclear weapons might be used in conflict; its $2 billion to $4 billion price tag would buy large amounts of conventional antitank weapons, and a Soviet version would undoubtedly be developed for use against U.S. ships and West European towns and industrial plants.

Ironically, Carter may find that he has to go ahead with the neutron program, even if he considers it unadvisable.

In deciding to delay, Carter said he would await signs of similar Soviet restraint in weapons development before a final decision to halt or go forward with neutron warheads.

So far, there are no signs of Soviet restraint.

James Hoge

Sun-Times Editor in Chief James Hoge tries automatic weapon at Belgian 1st Corps exercise outside Cologne.